

In the name of God: Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

What do Mighty Mouse, Neil Diamond, and Jesus have in common?

They are all going to make an appearance in this sermon! It's going to be subtle, but they will be there. Trust me.

The first thing we need to do this morning is review the gospel from last week, given this was a cliffhanger. Jesus went from his baptism and subsequent retreat in the desert to Galilee, the region where Nazareth lies. The stories of his preaching, teaching, and healing made their way back to his Nazareth despite the lack of internet and social media.

Finally, Jesus made it back to his hometown. On the sabbath, he did what he always did - went to the synagogue. Whether he was invited to read and teach, or he volunteered to do so, we don't know. We do know that he was handed the scroll of Isaiah and found his verse of choice: Isaiah 61 - the job description of the messiah.

Rabbi Jesus sat down in their midst, as teachers did in those days, and his first teaching brought amazement. They were shocked that such words could come from the carpenter's son. They were excited too - was Jesus saying he was the Messiah? Could it be true? If it is, we have it made! Jesus should have stopped there. But no. He kept going. Not just reading the text, but reading the minds of his listeners.

You see, they were expecting a Messiah that would swoop down from the clouds, creating chaos and then paradise. The New Jerusalem would be divinely created, no need for human activity. From the heavens one would see the red-caped Anointed One descend and hear him cry: "Here I come to save the day!" Mighty Messiah would do it all on his own - eliminate poverty, release those who were captive, give sight to the blind, free the oppressed, and proclaim the Lord's favor upon them. They wouldn't have to lift a finger. And, of course, it would be their people who would benefit. They were the chosen ones weren't they? Even more so, since Jesus was their homeboy.

On the contrary, my friend.

Jesus had just the opposite in mind. God doesn't swoop into our time to fix our problems. God requires our activity. God has partnered with us so that we can model Beloved Community. That partnership began with Abraham and Moses and continues to this day. The chosen people are appointed and anointed so that they could demonstrate God's Beloved Community, a community that includes all people. The scripture announces that those in need will no longer be that way because we are here.

On that day in Nazareth, Jesus quoted from the prophets about Elijah going to Sidon to assist a widow there and how he cured a Syrian from leprosy. Jesus didn't let the Nazareth community off the hook because he was one of them. They were made responsible for bringing forth justice, just as we are. Just because we know Jesus doesn't give us a "bye" in the work of social justice.

Therefore

We cannot say to the poor - fix yourselves.

We cannot say to the sick - find your own way out of your troubles.

We cannot say - we're only going to help the people we know, or who look like us, or who think like us, or who speak like us.

That message didn't sit well then and it doesn't now.

The rage that was present in the synagogue in Nazareth in their TODAY is the same as it is in our TODAY. It is the rage that comes with the realization that what you thought was yours and yours alone actually never belonged to you in the first place.

Jesus taught that God's justice needs to be for all people. For all people TODAY.

We need to act TODAY.

There is no yesterday or tomorrow for God. There is only TODAY.

That TODAY was as present to those in the synagogue in Nazareth as it is to us TODAY.

The immediacy of Jesus' message combined with the crushed expectations of his hometown crowd resulted not in admiration, but in rage.

It is the rage that comes when you are brought up short by someone you believe is somehow less wise, less experienced, less important than you.

“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

“She’s only in her 20’s?”

“How dare an undocumented immigrant demand a living wage.!”

Or, as I heard in my own childhood from my own grandparents....

“Some people need to learn and stay in their place.”

Fred Craddock said it so well: “Anger and violence are the last defense of a people who are made to face the truth of their tradition.”

It’s interesting, isn’t it, that the people who tried to throw Jesus off the cliff that day lost track of him. What a fitting metaphor from our friend Luke.

When we are brought up short, made to be accountable for our actions, Jesus is far from our sight and our minds. We don’t want to see him. We prefer he become invisible so that we might keep on doing what we’ve always done.

A relationship with Jesus always requires us to be changed. A relationship with Jesus means that we think, live, and act from love. Our work for justice isn't just because we're nice people, or because it's what we think we should do because we have more than we need. We do it because we love Jesus and because our covenant with God compels us to act, give, and live out of that love and not out of guilt or shame.

A relationship with Jesus means that we don't swoop into a situation crying "Here I come to save the day!" Rather we sit down and listen in love in order to enable healing to happen together.

A relationship with Jesus requires us to remember that each person we encounter has been traveling far, wanting to be free, needing a home, holding onto a dream. That home might be a safe shelter, a new community, a new country, or simply a place to be heard. We won't know unless we engage with them, one-on-one, in love.

A relationship with Jesus renews every morning. How will you engage with him...TODAY!